

## MANAGING CROP LANDS

Each year Central Valley farmers plant an average of 1.5 million acres of rice, corn, and other grains. During winter it's not uncommon for millions of waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds to feed and rest in flooded agricultural fields. Most of California's wintering waterfowl depend upon waste rice and aquatic invertebrates found in flooded, harvested fields. Spring farmlands also provide abundantly for wildlife. Wheat fields near standing water offer excellent nesting cover and support some of the highest densities of nesting ducks in the Central Valley. Rice levees with tall vegetation and fall-planted barley provide similar nesting benefits.

JACK KETTLER/ARND BRONKHORST PHOTOGRAPHY



*Ducks, pheasants, and other birds often nest in grain fields. Delaying the grain harvest for a few weeks—or even a few days—can substantially increase hatching success.*

## Alter your harvesting schedule

### What to do:

March 15 to July 1 is a crucial nesting and hatching period for pheasants, ducks, and other ground-nesting birds. It's also a period when farmers normally begin spring harvesting activities. Harvesting machinery eliminates nests and can kill setting hens that remain on their nests. If your operation allows it, delay the grain harvest until at least June 15. When possible, wait until July 1; this protects hens that did not nest until late May. If you have several fields to harvest, save the fields closest to water for last; they may have the highest nesting densities.

Although early cuttings are necessary in most haying operations, in some locations a delay of a few weeks, or even a few days, may be possible and can significantly increase duck

and pheasant production. If you are able to delay your harvest for waterfowl, make sure that your duck broods survive by having summer brood water within two miles until at least July 15.

### Benefits:

- Avoids destroying nests and displacing or killing nesting pheasants and ducks.

- Increases wildlife populations by allowing many adult ducks and pheasants to survive, successfully nest, and raise a brood.

- Increases waterfowl populations locally as young ducks that survive may return to the same area to nest.



*Duck eggs in a field.*

DUCKS UNLIMITED